

Cook that bird, the safe way

Cheyenne – Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department (CLCHD) wants you to take extra care when getting ready for that long-awaited turkey dinner. Food safety is an important every day concern. The bigger concern though is for holiday meals as we tend to not have as much time to really prepare our food the ‘correct’ way, additionally there is usually a larger quantity of food and it tends to sit out for long periods of time. This will give you some guidance for your turkey meal preparation.

Frozen turkey - Place the frozen turkey in the refrigerator or place it under cold running water to thaw. Thawing the bird may take a few days. A rule of thumb is about 24 hours per 4-5 lbs. Do not thaw out at room temperature!

Frozen and fresh turkeys – CLCHD’s Gary Hickman, Environmental Health Division Director, suggests not filling the bird’s cavity with stuffing! The bird cooks from the outside in leaving the inner meat and cavity undercooked (it will never reach the right temperature). The entire bird has to be cooked properly to avoid bacterial contamination. When that bird looks golden brown on the outside, chances are the inner cavity is still undercooked. Make your stuffing on the stove top or in a casserole. Also if you want to keep the bird from shrinking (empty cavity) you may want to fill loosely with different fruits that can be eliminated once the bird is thoroughly cooked. Check out the web for turkey recipes. Remember! An un-stuffed bird cooks faster than a stuffed one!

Cutting boards – We need to avoid cross-contamination. When you clean your bird and set it on the cutting board to dry, season, and/or baste, you are leaving bacteria on the board. CLCHD’s Jennifer Escobedo, Environmental Health Specialist, says “After you finish with the seasoning of the bird, wash, rinse, and sanitize the cutting board!” You can also avoid cross contamination by preparing vegetables first, potatoes next, and then seasoning the bird. This process allows you to wash the cutting board at the end of your preparation. Season the bird last and then wash all utensils and cutting board! Sanitize your dishes and work areas by mixing one capful of bleach to one gallon of water and wiping down contaminated surfaces with this solution after they are washed with hot, soapy water and rinsed. Also, make sure to wash your hands frequently

Basting – When you prepare the basting mixture of oil or butter, be sure that you only use it for basting the bird. Don’t use the same mixture for potatoes, rolls, biscuits, etc., as you could be contaminating those foods.

Cooking temperature – Use a poultry thermometer to make sure your fresh or frozen bird is cooked enough to eat. Your bird should be cooked to 165 -180° F.

Additional information regarding the safe cooking of poultry is available at Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department (307) 633-4090 or visit our website at www.laramiecountyhealth.com.

Additional information can be found at:
Additional websites.....

Butterball Turkey Hotline 1-800-288-8372 <http://www.butterball.com/>
FDA hotline 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366)
Nebraska Regional Poison Center 1-800-222-1222
U.S. Department of Agriculture www.holidayfoodsafety.org